



## **Learner resilience - building resilience in primary schools, secondary schools and pupil referral units**

<p><b>Report title:</b></p> <p>Learner resilience - building resilience in primary schools, secondary schools and pupil referral units</p>
<p><b>Report details</b></p> <p>The report was commissioned by the Welsh Government's Education Directorate to understand more about how pupils' resilience is being supported in primary and secondary schools and pupil referral units and to highlight best practice case studies to be shared across Wales.</p>
<p><b>Summary of main findings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Schools that are good at building the resilience of their learners are those that promote the emotional wellbeing and support the mental health of all their learners. As well as having a whole-school approach to wellbeing, these schools also provide specific interventions for learners who are particularly in need of support. In many instances, new whole-school approaches are adopted following the successful implementation of a particular strategy on a smaller scale.</li><li>• Inspection outcomes for providers inspected under the new common inspection framework (2017-2019) suggest that there is strong practice in schools in supporting pupils' wellbeing. The standard of care, support and guidance for pupils is good or better in most primary schools and a majority of secondary schools.</li><li>• Schools that are successful in building pupils' resilience have leaders that have developed a strong vision, supported by core values around promoting the wellbeing of all pupils. The vision is shared by all of the schools' stakeholders. They provide interventions for those pupils that need them the most as well as implementing successful strategies for whole-class situations when appropriate. These schools also place a strong emphasis on the wellbeing of their staff.</li><li>• School leaders rarely talk of building resilience as a main aim or objective. Resilience is often strengthened as a consequence of implementing strategies to target pupils' other needs. Schools recognise that there is no easy way to building resilience in pupils. They understand that it is a process that takes considerable investment</li></ul>

in time, energy and resources.

- A common feature of nearly all schools that are successful in building resilience in pupils is that there are very few, if any, fixed term exclusions over a long period. They have a strong inclusive ethos. They strive to understand and get to the root cause of particular challenges facing pupils and are willing to try different approaches to address the issues.
- Good schools share information between the relevant professionals and adults involved with particular pupils effectively and in a timely manner. They know that the earlier they can identify and support pupils who are struggling with their self-esteem and resilience, the more effective the intervention will be. They have processes for ensuring that all the relevant adults within the school are made aware of any concerns quickly and accurately.
- The most successful schools understand that building resilience is a continual process that begins with developing good relationships between adults and pupils and between pupils themselves. They understand that pupils' emotional wellbeing is the responsibility of all staff and that every interaction and engagement with pupils has an impact on their sense of worth. Staff know that all their words, actions and attitudes affect pupils' wellbeing. Where pupils feel a sense of belonging and connection, they are more likely to feel secure, safe and emotionally resilient.
- It is important that pupils have regular opportunities to express their emotions and share their feelings at school. Good schools have clear approaches for listening to and addressing pupils' concerns in a timely manner. They are alert to how pupils are feeling during the day, and work with pupils to identify particular staff members to whom they can turn if needed.
- Working closely with the home by providing enrichment activities and additional information can help to consolidate the school's work in helping to build the resilience of vulnerable pupils. Effective schools often work closely to support families of vulnerable pupils. Where the culture of the school is open and engaging, the families themselves may approach the school for support.
- Good schools use the expertise of relevant external agencies to supplement their work. External agencies can bring skills and expert knowledge that are not always available within schools and, when the relationship between all parties is strong, they work together in the

pupils' best interest, strengthening their resilience and improving their lives.

- Nurturing approaches can be very successful in helping to build resilience in pupils who are struggling to cope with their current circumstances. Trained staff can help pupils develop their personal and social skills and lay the foundations for building positive relationships with adults and peers. They equip pupils with the tools to help them become more resilient in the face of different challenges.
- Transitions, such as moving school, are periods where children can suffer emotional distress, or a decline in progress and commitment to learning, all of which can also undermine resilience. All schools aim to ease the transition process for pupils, particularly at key transition points. Good schools also have clear strategies for supporting pupils moving mid-term, especially when receiving pupils who may have struggled at their previous settings. They get to know the new pupils quickly, ensuring that support is available from the outset.

#### **Recommendations:**

The report contains no recommendations for the Welsh Government, local authorities or schools.

#### Welsh Government response:

**Accept:** The Welsh Government accepts the findings of the Estyn report.

The report identifies effective approaches to supporting pupils' resilience in primary and secondary schools and pupil referral units in Wales. We welcome the case studies undertaken by Estyn and will ensure that they are disseminated and promoted to all educational settings.

The current Covid-19 pandemic will undoubtedly mean that many children and young people who previously might not have required mental health support are more likely to need it now and in the future. As the impact of the pandemic and the restrictions on their lives continues to sink in, more young people are likely to experience feelings of loss from the social constraints placed upon them. Many will experience worries about returning to school; moving on to the next step in their learning and the impact on their future prospects; concerns about their own and their family's health; and, sadly for some, the impact of bereavement too.

Whilst supporting the emotional wellbeing and improving the resilience of all

our children across Wales is a long-term commitment for the Welsh Government, it is now more important than ever. It is central to our new curriculum and the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience.

This work forms part of our whole school approach to supporting the emotional health wellbeing of children and young people and £5m has been allocated in the Welsh Government's budget for 2020-21 to take this work forward. Funding includes:

- £1.25m allocated in April 2020 to extend and improve school counselling with a focus on targeting current waiting lists, increasing capacity and developing new ways of working to meet Covid demand;
- £1.5m to support local authorities in develop plans to support our wider whole school programme of activity and tackling the current Covid19 pandemic, including training teachers on their own and learner wellbeing, delivering universal and targeted interventions to learners and implementing age appropriate interventions for younger children (below Yr6) in primary schools; and
- Development of a new whole school approach framework for schools (which has been designed to help them develop/build on their current plans on for the development of a whole school approach), which issued on consultation earlier this month (July 2020).

We will of course continue to work with our partners to maximise the impact of the additional funding we have made available, and will continue to extract learning from practice so we can support all our learners with emotional health and wellbeing problems.

#### **Publication details.**

The report will be published on or after 15 July on ESTYN's website <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports>

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.



Digital ISBN 978-1-80038-881-9

© Crown copyright July 2020  
WG41008